

Press Release

June 10, 2025

Steve McQueen

Bass

June 15 – November 16, 2025

The Laurenz Foundation, Schaulager Basel is pleased to announce *Bass* (2024), one of the most recent works created by Steve McQueen. The world-renowned artist and Academy Award-winning filmmaker is returning to Schaulager in June 2025, with one of his most abstract work to date and 12 years after the groundbreaking exhibition, conceived as a “City of Cinemas” with over 20 video and film installations. Specifically attuned to the architecture of Schaulager, *Bass* is largely inspired by McQueen’s keen interest in the effect of light, colour and sound on our physical perception of space and time.

“What I love about light and sound is that they are both created through movement and fluidity. They can be molded into any shape, like vapor or a scent; they can sneak into any nook and cranny. I also love the beginning point where something isn’t a form as much as it is all-encompassing.”

Steve McQueen, 2025

Bass is as immersive as it is immaterial, for it consists purely of colour and sound: deep bass frequencies resonate in the space – single tones or traces of a melody are heard, sometimes louder, sometimes softer. The space is also flooded with light that slowly, almost imperceptibly runs through the entire visible colour spectrum from deep red to almost ultraviolet. The work holds visitors in thrall the moment they enter Schaulager, its sheer scale heightening the overwhelming impact even more. *Bass* takes possession of the entire monumental interior of Schaulager, including the full height of the atrium and the breadth of the exhibition spaces. The vast interior volume is transformed into a resonating body for a temporary intervention that invites visitors to engage with this immediate, powerful experience. The composition of *Bass* emerged in collaboration with an intergenerational group of musicians from the Black diaspora under the direction of McQueen along with the renowned bassist Marcus Miller, who brought in several other acclaimed musicians: Meshell Ndegeocello and Aston Barrett Jr. (both on electric bass), Mamadou Kouyaté (on ngoni, a traditional West African string instrument) and Laura-Simone Martin (on upright acoustic bass).

McQueen’s fascination with the bass is no coincidence. Especially in the context of Black history, bass instruments have played a major part in formulating distinctive musical genres and cultural traditions, allowing for the musical articulation of emotions otherwise inexpressible with words. As the foundation of many compositions, low bass frequencies provide stability and depth of harmony that is experienced in an embodied way.

Bass is jointly commissioned by the Laurenz Foundation, Schaulager Basel and the Dia Art Foundation in New York. In 2022, McQueen was invited to work out a new project that would first be presented at Dia Art Foundation and subsequently at Schaulager. Inspired by the cavernous, columned space at Dia Beacon,

McQueen unexpectedly decided not to shoot a film but to design a temporary intervention consisting exclusively of light and sound. After premiering at Dia Beacon in 2024, *Bass* will be adapted to the impressive architecture of Schaulager for its presentation there in 2025.

Publications

Two publications accompany the show: *Steve McQueen. Bass* (2024) was published in collaboration with the Laurenz Foundation and Dia Art Foundation. The second publication *Steve McQueen: Bass Volume* focuses on the presentation of *Bass* at Schaulager and will be released in summer 2025. Both books were produced in close collaboration with McQueen and the designer Irma Boom. The immaterial intensity of *Bass* has been uniquely transferred to the pages of a book in both publications.

About Steve McQueen

Over the past two decades, British artist and filmmaker Steve McQueen (b.1969 in London, lives and works in London and Amsterdam) has acquired an outstanding reputation for his work. Major museums worldwide have devoted exhibitions to his award-winning oeuvre, including Dia Art Foundation (2024), Pirelli HangarBicocca, Milan (2022), Tate Modern (2020), the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston (2017), the Museum of Modern Art, New York (2017), Schaulager (2013), and the Art Institute of Chicago (2012). His project *Year 3* was showcased at Tate Britain in 2019. McQueen received the Turner Prize in 1999, and he represented Great Britain at the Venice Biennale in 2009. In 2014, Harvard University awarded him the W.E.B. DuBois Medal in honour of his contribution to African and African American studies and in 2016, he received the Johannes Vermeer Award from the Dutch government. McQueen is the director of five feature films, *Hunger* (2008), *Shame* (2011), *12 Years a Slave* (2013), *Widows* (2018), and most recently *Blitz* (2024). In 2020, he made *Small Axe*, an anthology of five films about London's West Indian community and, in 2021, *Uprising*, a 3-part documentary with James Rogan, about the New Cross Fire in London in 1981. McQueen won the Oscar for best motion picture for *12 Years a Slave* at the Academy Awards in 2014. He was named an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in 2002 and a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) in 2011 for achievements in both the fine arts and filmmaking and was knighted in the 2020 New Year Honours list. Most recently, McQueen and his wife Bianca Stigter were awarded honorary doctorates from the University of Amsterdam for their joint project *Occupied City* (2024). McQueen has been appointed Charles Eliot Norton Professor of Poetry at Harvard University for the 2025–2026 academic year.

About Schaulager

Schaulager of the Laurenz Foundation in Basel/Münchenstein has innovatively combined the preservation and presentation of contemporary art since its inception in 2003. It houses the works of the Emanuel Hoffmann Foundation, founded in 1933, and makes them accessible to specialists for research, whenever they are not on view at the Kunstmuseum and the Kunstmuseum Gegenwart in Basel or in international exhibitions. Students and schoolchildren have the opportunity to take part in Schaulager's art education programs and study the original works in the open storage spaces. In addition, Schaulager mounts major survey exhibitions at irregular intervals, dedicated primarily to artists represented in the collection. Schaulager also hosts guided tours, lectures, symposia and other public events. Plans are underway for an extension designed by the world-renowned architectural office Herzog & de Meuron.